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# REMARKS ON THE TEACHING OF MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE IN PARIS AND LONDON

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## REMARKS ON THE TEACHING OF MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE IN PARIS AND LONDON.

WHEN I went to Paris—some years ago now—to pursue my medical studies in special branches, I was particularly struck by the way in which the practical side of medical jurisprudence was taught there. So much so that I soon found myself frequently bending my steps towards the low building at the back of Notre Dame, which stands almost overhanging the Seine, as if on the look-out for the flotsam and jetsam of humanity thrown up by the turbid waters. The building I mean is next to the place where the tragic bodies of the unknown used to be exposed behind a glaucous glass screen to the public view, but are now no longer so, and forms part of the institution known the world over as the Morgue. It was in this insignificant outhouse that the late Professor Brouardel and his assistants carried out necropsies with a view to elucidating the cause of death, what time the busy tide of life hurried to and fro without and children played under the mother's eye in the cathedral garden close by. The examination of the bodies was done systematically, and one learnt more in this way than by reading and attending *ex cathedra* lectures, useful though both undoubtedly are; indeed, these methods complete one another, and all have their place. A variety of cases passed before the eyes, the pros and cons in favour of accident, suicide, or murder being carefully discussed and illuminated by comparisons and amplifications drawn from the experience of experts, the viscera being carefully preserved, *secundum artem*, where poisoning was suspected or further examination was necessary for the toxicologist and pathologist to report on. So that, if one took the trouble, cases could be followed up in all

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their details, and formed an object-lesson which was stored up in the mind, having penetrated there by the visual, auditory, and other senses, and also by the motor paths when written notes were made at the end of the day. Small details frequently helped to fix the case on the brain, such as in one instance I remember well—the body of a young woman in her wedding-dress, with bits of orange-blossom still elinging to her wet and matted hair.

The practical medico-legal demonstrations at the Morgue were first organized in 1879 as the result of an understanding arrived at between the Ministry of Public Instruction (representing the Faculty of Medicine), the Ministry of Justice (acting for the Courts of Justice or Tribunal of the Seine Department), and the Prefecture of Police, to which the Morgue is actually attached. The teaching is under the direction of the Professor of Medical Jurisprudence of the University of Paris. The police authorities give the use of the building I have referred to, and the bodies are supplied by the Seine Courts under the orders of the Juges d'Instruction of the Tribunal, who direct what post-mortem examinations are to be made.

In addition to the Morgue, there is a laboratory of toxicology, which is kept up jointly by the City of Paris (or, more strictly speaking, by the Préfecture de Police) and the Medical Faculty. The laboratory itself is housed at the Préfecture de Police, and the toxicologist-in-chief—at present M. Ogier—and his assistants are remunerated partly by the Préfecture and partly by the Medical Faculty, the latter further making a yearly allowance for the supply of instruments, chemicals, etc. The employés of the Morgue are also paid by the Préfecture de Police, for that place serves as a mortuary for unknown cadavers and for the bodies which are the subject of legal investigation, and was not primarily intended for teaching purposes. For services in connexion with the latter the Faculty allows a sum of money to the attendants. The administrative mechanism is therefore somewhat complicated, depending as it does on three distinct departments, but it speaks well for all concerned that matters have worked smoothly from the start.

The Morgue and the laboratory of toxicology are open to medical students of some years' standing and to qualified men, both French

and foreign. Cards are delivered by the Faculty of Medicine and by the directors of the laboratory.

But a further step was taken in 1903, when the Medico-Legal Institute of the University of Paris was created by the exertions of the late Professor Brouardel and the present Professor, M. Thoinot, who is an honorary member of our Society.

The report<sup>1</sup> of the first year's work proved very satisfactory. The courses were :

1. Theoretical lectures on medical jurisprudence by the professor and the assistant-professor.

2. Practical work at the Morgue on three afternoons a week by the professor and his assistants (in 1904 Dr. Descoust and Dr. Vibert, in charge respectively of the medico-legal and pathological anatomy laboratories).

3. Twice a week practical examinations of injuries, accidents to work-people, drawing up of reports, and so forth.

4. Three afternoons a week practical demonstrations at the laboratory of toxicology: physiology, pathological anatomy, and toxicology.

5. Twice a week theoretical lectures on mental diseases at the Asile Sainte-Anne (one of the Paris asylums).

6. Twice a week clinical demonstrations of mental cases at the Asile Sainte-Anne.

7. Twice a week theoretical lectures in mental diseases from the medico-legal point of view ; and

8. Examination of actual cases and method of reporting on the aforesaid.

In addition to the foregoing, M. Bertillon, Director of the Anthropometrie Department at the Préfecture de Police, demonstrates the method of identification by measurements and finger-prints. There is also a special course for those who desire to obtain a certificate in this branch (*Brévet d'étude du portrait parlé*), which was instituted in 1902, an examination which all police functionaries have to pass.

These courses extend over two sessions, and are open to qualified

medical men, French and foreign, and to medical students of the fourth year, the fees being made up as follows :

Entrance fee	...	...	...	20 francs
Library subscription	...	...	..	10 „
Four quarterly subscriptions to the laboratory at 75 francs a quarter—that is	...	...	...	300 „
Examination fee	...	...	...	100 „
Total				430 „

A diploma is delivered to those who satisfy the examiners in the following subjects :

- (a) Theoretical medical jurisprudence.
- (b) Practical, consisting of one of the following : a post-mortem examination ; a microscopical investigation ; the examination of a living subject ; a report on a medico-legal case.
- (c) Theoretical paper on mental diseases from a medico-legal point of view, consisting of a report on a supposed case.
- (d) Practical examination of an actual mental case, with a report on the mental condition and its consequences.

During the first year of this special medico-legal course (1903-1904) twenty-two students entered, but nineteen only were actually examined. Out of these fifteen obtained the diploma.

At the time that I was studying in Paris I saw the following necropsies performed at the Morgue :

Drowning and bodies found in the water	...	...	...	4 cases
Hanging	...	...	...	2 „
Abortion	...	...	...	2 „
Infanticide	...	...	...	1 case
Death by fire-arms	...	...	...	1 „
Found dead	...	...	...	{ Identification case
Sudden death	...	...	...	
Death from blows, violence	...	...	...	2 „
Death as a result of a scaffold accident	...	...	...	1 case



These examinations were thoroughly carried out and discussed at length by the late Professor Brouardel and his assistants. I need hardly insist on the numerous issues involved in such inquiries, for the domain of medical jurisprudence is a wide one, and its purview includes all branches of medicine, such as physiology, anatomy, pathology, embryology, toxicology, and so forth. As an intellectual medical exercise the subject is of the highest value, for it is a practical application of medical study in its various departments, and, moreover, it touches on important questions of physics and chemistry. There are also the legal aspects, together with the social, economic, and psychological points raised or suggested by such investigations. Personally, I have never regretted the time I spent at the Paris Morgue, for the reasons I have stated.

I have already alluded to the use of the Morgue as a depository for unknown bodies sent there by the Préfecture de Police. On arrival the clothes are removed, searched, and cleansed, in order to discover, if possible, a clue to identification. In the case of recent death, the cadaver and the clothes are placed in the cold room, kept at a temperature of  $30^{\circ}$  below zero Centigrade, behind the glass screen I have mentioned. The Prefect of Police has recently made an order excluding the general public, persons possibly able to assist the authorities in identifying the deceased being now alone admitted to view.

If, on the other hand, the body is in a state of decomposition, it is dealt with as before mentioned, but in such a case not placed on view behind the glass screen, as the features are unrecognizable, but in a compartment of another cold room, kept at from  $6^{\circ}$  to  $15^{\circ}$  below zero Centigrade (freezing-point). In this way bodies can be kept for some months, thus allowing for attempts at identification to be made before a post-mortem examination is proceeded with.

In this connexion I am able to give some figures, kindly supplied by M. Bertillon, as to the number of corpses measured and finger-printed. In 1905, 69 bodies were dealt with in this way and 13 were identified; in 1906 the corresponding numbers were 68 and 19 respectively.

In the case of unknown dead bodies found in the streets, rivers, or canals, a post-mortem is carried out only in cases of suspected crime, an order of the Procureur de la République being required before it can be proceeded with.

The cadavers of identified persons, but whose domicile is unknown, and all bodies on which a post-mortem has been ordered, are also taken to the Morgue. In the case of sudden death in private practice, the local Commissaire de Police is informed of the occurrence, and he holds an inquiry. If there is nothing suspicious about the death—that is, nothing criminal—a burial order is obtained from the Procureur de la République. Otherwise, the body is taken to the Morgue, there to await further investigation; but, according to Dr. Dabout, this cannot be legally enforced should the relations object. With regard to suicides, they are only taken to the Morgue if found in public places and there is no clue as to their identity; but if their domicile can be ascertained, they are taken to their home. As to the victims of criminal violence admitted to hospital and who die in the institution, the bodies are taken to the Morgue and a post-mortem is carried out there, after which an order for burial is handed to the family.<sup>2</sup>

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Thoinot, the present Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the University of Paris, for the foregoing details as to the working of his department. I take this opportunity of thanking him for his great courtesy in the matter.

Whilst I was engaged collecting material for this paper, Mr. Henslowe Wellington very kindly called my attention to an article by Dr. Dabout<sup>3</sup> in which the Morgue of Paris and our English mortuaries are compared. The author has been good enough to send me a copy of his paper, which I may say contains a variety of details, historical and otherwise, concerning the Paris Morgue.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Dabout<sup>3</sup> also describes our mortuaries, and I am pleased to say that he was greatly impressed by what he saw in this country, insisting on the superiority of our mortuary installations, especially from the hygienic standpoint, as compared with the Morgue; and I quite agree with him. As a Londoner I consider that in this respect we are greatly in advance, for the Morgue is quite unworthy of Paris, subserving, as it does, the needs of some four millions of



inhabitants. Dr. Dabout specially insists that in London the requirements of the living have not been lost sight of in the provision of places for the reception of the dead. In the way, however, of cold storage chambers, and in the use made of bodies for teaching purposes, I think we are behind our friends across the Channel.

On my return from Paris—some years ago now—I ventured to point out in a medical journal that this practical teaching might be improved in London. I was not disappointed to find that no attention whatever was paid to what I had suggested; but when this Medico-Legal Society was started, the idea came up again in my mind. The result is this paper.

Now, in London, when I was a student, there were set lectures in medical jurisprudence, and some practical work in toxicology, and it is the same apparently at the present day. But one of the objects of my remarks is to lead to discussion in the hope of obtaining more definite information from those actually engaged in teaching than I have been able to gather. It is true that post-mortems on suicide and murder cases brought to hospital were carried out in the usual manner, but not specially from the medico-legal point of view and in the exhaustive way that obtains at the Paris Morgue.

I may add that the teacher of medical jurisprudence at University College in my time was the late Dr. George Vivian Poore, whose fascinating and brilliant lectures I never missed. At a later period I counted it as a pleasure and an honour to assist my late teacher and friend in seeing his racy "Lectures on Medical Jurisprudence" through the press.<sup>4</sup>

Here it is our system that I am criticizing, not our individual teachers, for without any desire to be boastful on national grounds, I can say we have in this country as good cerebral material as anywhere in the world. People who cannot or do not read French and German books will be glad to hear that English men of science, for instance, are frequently held up to admiration and cited as examples to imitate by Continental writers, a point which did not escape Herbert Spencer.<sup>5</sup> If I have somewhat insisted on this, it is in no bombastie spirit, as I have said, but to some extent to resist

the absurd notion, which in some quarters has become a kind of monomania, that we are played out and ought to be providing a Morgue for the national body. I am greatly opposed to this miserable way of looking at things, not on political party lines, but on the broad ground of common sense and fact.

In bringing before you details of how the teaching of medical jurisprudence is carried out in Paris, it is not with a desire that we in London should slavishly imitate other countries. Nations, like individuals, must work out their own salvation, dree their own weird, as best they may. The genius of a people must be taken into account. My point is, Cannot we devise in this great metropolis of London, where there is no dearth of material, some system to improve the practical teaching of medical jurisprudence; and that without interfering with our ideas of individual freedom and a healthy antipathy to over-officialism? In Paris the carrying out of the inquiries I have alluded to is always entrusted to experts; with us any medical man may have to deal with an investigation as to the cause of death, when such is discoverable, be it added—a point which has been ably dealt with by Dr. F. J. Smith and discussed before this Society.<sup>6</sup> On the whole, there is much to be said in favour of our system, which works fairly well in practice—that is, as well as is humanly possible in the detection of crime, for expert Crown referees take up special cases. It encourages initiative, whereas the other method tends to crush it out of the individual. My own idea would be to establish centres for the practical teaching of medical jurisprudence at mortuaries conveniently situated as regards our medical schools, and where advanced students could attend necropsies carried out by a teacher of medical jurisprudence or a Crown expert and assistants, such students in some cases going through the post-mortem examination themselves under the supervision aforementioned. The medical man who had been in attendance on a case or called to view a dead body would describe what he knew of the facts from his own observation, and for this and his subsequent evidence before a court, coroner's or otherwise, he would be paid a proper fee, without any unseemly bickerings, which sometimes become little less than disgusting. Every medical

man so attending is entitled to be properly treated in this respect, and remunerated in a manner worthy of a people which prides itself on its generous instincts.

Perhaps a central medico-legal Institute might later on be founded, with laboratories, and the practical subjects taught there.

I need scarcely say that any medical man desirous of attending the medico-legal necropsies should be allowed to do so without let or hindrance.

As regards toxicology, the examination of viscera, etc., for poisonous substances must necessarily be in the hands of trained scientific chemists, although medical men should be acquainted in a general way with such substances and the methods employed for their detection.

Identification by the method of finger-prints, which under the guidance of Sir Edward Henry, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, has given such good results in criminal cases, should be more widely known. Of course, such finger-prints in corpses would only be obtainable before decomposition of the parts had set in. In the latter case, anthropometric measurements might prove of service. I am indebted to Sir Edward for his book on the "Classification and Uses of Finger-prints," in which a number of interesting details will be found,<sup>7</sup> and also for other information on the subject. According to Billet, in China and other Far Eastern countries it has been an immemorial custom for a print of the palmar interarticular skin-folds to appear in signed documents as a means of future identification, together with, in some cases, the length of the nail from the root to the tip of the finger.<sup>8</sup> In connexion with the subject of finger-prints, touching the seal, as it obtains to-day in English legal ritual, may be a survival of an old custom of this sort. This is a mere suggestion and quite imaginative on my part.

I think I have detained you long enough with my survey of the subject to be now discussed. I do not wish to be dogmatic in any way—indeed, I may confess that I am looking forward to learning a good deal from the speakers to the discussion, who will look at the matter from their special point of view, and either confirm, correct, criticize, or reject some or all of the preliminary conclusions I have arrived at and submitted to them.

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<sup>3</sup> Dabout : Les Morgues à Paris et en Angleterre. Étude Médico légale comparée (*Revue de Médecine Légale*, No. 2, Février, 1907, p. 37).

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert Spencer : The Study of Sociology, Chapter IX. : "The Bias of Patriotism" (19th edition, 1897).

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<sup>7</sup> Sir Edward Richard Henry : Classification and Uses of Finger-prints (3rd edition, 1905).

<sup>8</sup> Albert Billet : Deux Ans dans le Haut-Tonkin, 1896, p. 73, Fig. 9.